

Message Text

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ACTION PM-03

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 EUR-12 EA-06 NEA-09 ISO-00 ACDA-05 SAJ-01

MMS-01 EB-07 CIAE-00 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ERDA-05 AID-05 IGA-01

/102 W

----- 128590

P R 211029Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5042

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

CNO

CINCPAC

CINCUSNAVEUR

COMIDEASTFOR

CINCPACFLT

CTG 77.7

COMSEVENTHFLT

SECDEF WASHDC

S E C R E T PORT LOUIS 0141

CNO, CINCPAC, CINCUSNAVEUR ALSO FOR POLADS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR MP

SUBJECT: US DISASTER RELIEF AND DIEGO: MILITANT MAURITIAN MARXISTS

FROTH AT THE MOUTH

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REF: PORT LOUIS 0073

1. SUMMARY: TOUGH ANTI-US MARXIST PARTY LEADER BERENGER HAS DENOUNCED RAMGOOLAM GOVT. FOR INCOMPETENCE IN COPING WITH CYCLONE DAMAGES, AND ME PERSONALLY FOR MAKING "PROPAGANDA SPECTACLE" OUT OF USN DISASTER RELIEF OPERATIONS AND FOR "INTERFERING IN LOCAL POLITICS" BECAUSE I SAID SOME PEOPLE EXAGGERATED IMPORTANCE OF DIEGO. NET RESULT FOR TIME BEING HAS BEEN TO WEAKEN HIS OWN POSITION AND STRENGTHEN SYMPATHY FOR US HERE, BUT HE WILL CONTINUE TO BE TROUBLEMAKER FOR US AND SUBVERSIVE THREAT TO GOM. END SUMMARY.

2. ON FEBRUARY 3 HARD BITTEN ANTI-AMERICAN MARXIST LEADER OF MMM, PAUL BERENGER, AND HIS CLOSEST LIEUTENANTS DID UTMOST TO VILIFY US IN ATTACKING US ON DIEGO AND OUR INDIAN OCEAN PRESENCE ON GOVERNMENT-OWNED TV STATION FORUM, WHICH WAS CHAIRED BY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MINISTER JAGATSINGH (TO WHOSE MINISTRY WE PROVIDE \$1.2 MILLION PER YEAR IN FOOD FOR WORK). FORUM AND BERENGER'S PARTICIPATION IN IT (BEFORE LARGEST MAURITIAN AUDIENCE HE HAS EVER HAD HERE) WAS PERSONALLY AUTHORIZED BY PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM. THREE GOVERNMENT PARTY PANELISTS (IN ROLE OF MAURITIAN PEACE COUNCIL MEMBERS) OSTENSIBLY REPRESENTING "OTHER SIDE" DID LITTLE TO REFUTE BERENGER'S ATTACKS ON BOTH RAMGOOLAM'S ADMINISTRATION AND US. THEY ESSENTIALLY SYMPATHIZED WITH OPPOSITION TO DIEGO AND OUR PRESENCE IN INDIAN OCEAN, REMONSTRATING ONLY THAT BERENGER'S STRONG-ARM METHODS (INCLUDING REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO MOUNT DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST THIS EMBASSY) WERE WRONG.

3. PRESS AND PUBLIC REACTIONS RANGED FROM CASTIGATIONS OF FORUM AS "PUERILE ANTI-AMERICANISM" AND "RIDICULOUS FARCE" (ON THE RIGHT) TO SOMEWHAT EMBARRASSED SYMPATHY WITH IDEA OF "DEMILITARIZATION" AND PEACE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN (CENTER AND MODERATE LEFT).

4. JUST BEFORE THE TV SHOW JAGATSINGH APPEALED PERSONALLY TO ME TO UNDERSTAND THE GOVERNMENT'S NEED TO "TILT" A LITTLE TO THE LEFT IN ORDER TO "CONTAIN" THE RADICAL AND DANGEROUS BERENGER. HE STATED THAT HE AND GOM WOULD NEVER ALLOW MAURITIUS TO BECOME ANOTHER CUBA OR SEE ITS PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM DESTROYED. LATER RAMGOOLAM HIMSELF CLAIMED TO ME THAT
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HE FELT IT NECESSARY TO USE THE FORUM AS A "SAFETY VALVE" TO LET BERENGER BLOW OFF STEAM THE BETTER TO COPE WITH HIM IN LONG RUN AND DEFLECT HIM FROM VIOLENT DEMONSTRATION. TWICE RECENTLY RAM STRESSED TO ME HIS DETERMINATION TO KEEP THAT "DANGEROUS SUBVERSIVE" BERENGER UNDER CONTROL.

5. I BIDE BY TIME SEEKING CHANCE TO RIPOSTE WITHOUT BUILDING UP BERENGER EVEN MORE. THEN CAME CYCLONE GERVAISE AND THE

UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE OUR FRIENDSHIP AND DEPENDABILITY WITH THE CRUCIAL HELP OF OUR NAVY -- TO REPLY TO CHEAP RHETORIC WITH HUMANITARIAN DEEDS.

6. BERENGER' FIRST REACTION WAS TO CASTIGATE GOM FOR ASKING FOR ANY FOREIGN AID. THAT WENT OVER LIKE A LEAD BALLOON HERE. THEN ON FEBRUARY 15 AS THE ENTERPRISE WAS SAFELY DISAPPEARING OVER THE HORIZON, BERENGER HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE IN WHICH HE ATTEMPTED TO PILLORY RAMGOOLAM AND HIS GOVERNMENT FOR "SLOTH AND INCOMPETENCE" IN COPING WITH THE CYCLONE DAMAGE AND DENOUNCED RAMGOOLAM FOR MAKING AN "ENORMOUS GIFT TO AMERICAN DIPLOMACY" BY ACCEPTING US AID WITHOUT LIMITING ITS PUBLIC RELATIONS IMPACT WHICH CAUSED MAURITIANS TO FORGET DIEGO, VIETNAM AND THE US THREAT AGAINST THE MIDDLE EAST OIL PRODUCERS. FINALLY HE VENTED HIS SPLEEN ON ME AND ADMIRAL HARRIS FOR TRYING TO DECEIVE THE MAURITIAN PEOPLE BY CLAIMING DIEGO IS ONLY A SMALL SUPPLY BASE AND SPECIFICALLY ACCUSED ME OF MAKING "PROPAGANDA SPECTACLE" OUT OF USN RELIEF OPERATIONS AND OF "INTERFERENCE IN LOCAL POLITICS" BECAUSE I HAD SAID TO PRESS THAT SOME "POLITICIANS" (I ACTUALLY SAID PEOPLE) EXAGGERATED IMPORTANCE OF DIEGO.

7. WHILE BERENGER'S RANTINGS WERE HEADLINED IN MOST OF THE 14 LOCAL DAILY NEWSPAPERS, EDITORIAL COMMENT HAS BEEN ALMOST ENTIRELY NEGATIVE AND ONE OF THE MORE CONSERVATIVE PAPERS PRINTED LETTERS TO THE EDITOR FROM PEOPLE WHO CLAIMED THEY HAD PREVIOUSLY SYMPATHIZED WITH BERENGER BUT NOW COULD NO LONGER DO SO. ON FEBRUARY 17 EDITOR OF PRIME MINISTER'S NEWSPAPER ADVANCE COMMENTED SARCASTICALLY THAT TO MAKE BERENGER HAPPY IT WOULD HAVE BEEN NECESSARY FOR GOM TO TELL THE AMERICANS "COME BUT DON'T LET YOURSELF BE SEEN BY THE POPULATION. MIX WITH THE MAURITIANS, SPEAK CREOLE SO THAT YOU WILL NOT BE RECOGNIZED. DESPITE GERVAISE YOU KNOW THERE IS STILL THE QUESTION OF DIEGO." THE EDITOR STRESSED THAT IT WOULD
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HAVE BEEN "INDECENT" FOR THE PRIME MINISTER TO ASK FOR AMERICAN AID AND IMPOSE ALL SORTS OF RESTRICTIONS ON THE AID. WRITER SAID MY REMARK ABOUT THOSE WHO EXAGGERATED THE IMPORTANCE OF DIEGO SHOULD NOT BE HELD AGAINST THE U.S. REPRESENTATIVE HERE ESPECIALLY WHEN EVERYONE KNOWS THE IMPORTANT EFFORTS HE MADE SO THAT US AID COULD ARRIVE PROMPTLY. ARTICLE CONCLUDED THAT BERENGER HAD MISSED A GREAT OCCASION TO KEEP QUIET, AND IF HE HAD DONE SO, MANY CYCLONE VICTIMS WOULD HAVE BEEN GRATEFUL TO HIM.

8. BERENGER AND HIS CATS WILL NO DOUBT CONTINUE TO BE A THORN IN OUR SIDE AND A THREAT TO THE RAMGOOLAM ADMINISTRATION. YOUNG BERENGER, WHO TEETHED ON THE 1968 PARIS STUDENT RIOTS, IS TOUGH, SMART AND A DYED-IN-THE WOOL MARXIST. BUT HIS INTEMPERATE MENDACIOUS ATTACKS HAVE, FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST,

LOST HIM SOME SUPPORT HERE AND GENERATED ADDITIONAL SYMPATHY
AND UNDERSTANDING FOR US AMONG MANY MAURITIANS IN AND OUT OF
GOM.

9. ME AESOPIAN CONCLUSION: IT'S AN ILL WIND THAT BLOWS NO
GOOD.
MANHARD

SECRET

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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